

A great deal of study of Fiore's work was conducted since the mid '90s and 2000s, and, while some friendly disagreements still remain, the manuscripts have largely been demystified and interpreted. There is little disagreement over the plays themselves, and the principles have mostly been ironed out. While we cannot know for sure that our understanding of Fiore's work is accurate, the general consensus is informed by interpretations of other sources, such as Vadi's *De Arte Gladiatoria*, as well as later Bolognese and the contemporary German works. These multiple lines of evidence converge and seem to indicate that, if we're not 100% correct, we're not far off the mark.

However, there are some aspects of these works which indicate a wider martial context. Fiore either assumes that the reader knows these basic principles or techniques, or laid out the foundation for us to extrapolate and interpolate techniques and plays ourselves. For example, while he explicitly shows (X) plays for the sword in one hand, a complete system for this weapon can be extracted from the complete sword in two hands and sword on horseback, and, to a lesser degree, the other portions of his manuscript. Additionally, while he shows (x) plays of the wrestling, we can use this as a foundation to extrapolate a full and effective hand-to-hand combat system.

In this article, I will seek to demonstrate a 'lost' guard. I say 'lost' since it is alluded to throughout Fiore's work, from the wrestling to the poleaxe. (Note: I will only use the Getty manuscript. I can take the moral high ground and say that I find Leoni's translation to be excellent, and that I am terrible at translating medieval Italian; however, it would be more accurate to say that I'm lazy and can't be bothered to look further.) Since this guard is found throughout the manuscript, it is reasonable to give it an illustrious place of prominence with the other four basic guards; *porta di ferro*, *denti di cinghiaro* (*cinghiaro/zhingiare/whatever*), *posta longa* and *posta frontale*.

The guard in question has been widely illustrated – usually in the form of a bad move – but further study may indicate that it is not as bad as previously thought. While Fiore has not named this particular guard, others at *Les Maîtres d'Armes* have named it *Posta ala di pollo*, or the Chicken Wing Guard, because it makes you place your arm in the shape reminiscent of a chicken wing.

How it done

This guard can be taken armed and unarmed, although it is likely that the grip on your weapon will be one handed. It can be done from either the right or left side, and with either leg forward in either case. It can be done back-weighted; can be done close to the body or extended; and can even be done from behind.

The easiest way to practice *posta ala di pollo* is begin in the unarmed *posta longa* on the right. Then, try to bring your right wrist in contact with your right shoulder, and break the wrist by either extend the fingers toward the ground or

the front, or try to have them touch your right elbow. The picture below shows the basic form of *posta ala di pollo*. Its key characteristic is the broken wrist formation and weird elbow angle. This can be referred to as the *posta de la verra ala di pollo*, or the true chicken wing guard.



If your elbow points towards the ceiling, it is *posta ala di pollo bastarda*, or bastarg chicken wing guard.

It is a reversed *posta ala di pollo* if your guard-hand is behind you.

It is an extended *posta* if your arm is somewhat extended, and your wrist isn't very close to your shoulder.

For example, when an opponent puts you into a wrist-lock, you most likely adopt a reversed extended *posta ala di pollo*, that is, you are not quite facing your opponent (you may actually be facing the other direction), with your locked wrist in broken formation behind you, elbow and fingers pointing up. If your opponent collapses distance – which is hoped for, as will be explained later – it becomes a reversed *posta ala di pollo*, but not extended since your wrist is most likely tucked into your armpit.



Evidence for *Posta ala di pollo*

Fiore references this in the second and third plays of *abrazare* – when the student prepares to do the arm lock, I can pull my hand back into *posta ala di pollo*. In the second play: 'If the opponent going against the First Master tries to get his left hand away from the Master's shoulder to perform a different defence...' In the third play, he repeats pretty much the same thing: 'If the opponent took his left hand away from the Master's shoulder...'

While Fiore does not explicitly calls this withdrawing of the hand a 'guard', we know – from the rest of the manuscript, and others, such as explicitly indicated in Viggiani's work – that guards are transitions between movements, which are transitions between guards. Clearly, pulling the hand back is a movement, and, just as clearly, the hand is withdrawn into *posta ala di pollo*.

The guard can also be found in several instances of the First Master of Dagger. In the Remedy, or counter of the first King of Dagger, the action is to trap your opponent's wrist into a lock with the dagger. For all intents and purposes, the opponent goes into *posta ala di pollo* – extended if the master keeps distance,

collapsed if he closes in and finishes the technique of planting the dagger in his back.

While it is debatable that anybody placed into a *chiave forte* is, in fact, in *posta ala di pollo* because they are not standing upright, or by the fact the he/she is in *chiave forte*, I would argue that the fact that the arm is in such an *ala di pollo* shape, and because it is the position of least pain, would qualify for the guard.

Use of Posta Ala di Pollo

So, what is the use of *posta ala di pollo*? Most people would say that it is not a good position to be in, and that it is either a knee-jerk response to a bad situation, or in fact placed into the *posta ala di pollo* by the opponent. Some would even say that going to *ala di pollo* is a pretty stupid move. Well, stupid like a fox, as we shall see.

Posta ala di pollo can serve various purposes, but its most important one is that allows one to either pull out of a bad situation and try something else, or collapse distance and bring your other side (hand, weapon, etc...) to bear.

Many of the uses of *posta ala di pollo* can be extrapolated from the text. For example, in the second play of *abrazare*, the Getty manuscript mentions that '(...) If the opponent going against the First Master tries to get his left hand away from the Master's shoulder to perform a different defense,...'. This manoeuvre is a transition from *posta longa* to *posta ala di pollo*. Since the focus is on the Companion, Fiore only explores what this last one should do in case this transition. However, we can extrapolate from the manuscript, such as from the qualities required of *abrazare*, specifically the knowledge of the places in which to strike, that one can transfer to *posta ala di pollo*, gain measure and punch the Companion in the face, or perform the fourth play of *abrazare*. Or collapse distance and perform an elbow strike to the face.

A related advantage of *posta ala di pollo* is that it can be assumed from behind, as stated above. Following the previous example, the play can turn his body



From an arm bar...



... I can collapse distance and perform an elbow strike to the face.

away and strike the Companion's eyes with his fingers from behind, allowing the player time to move out of measure and perform a *tutta volta* of the feet and face his opponent once again.

The great advantage of *posta ala di pollo* is not only that it can create distance, it



... strike the Companion's eyes with his fingers from behind.

can also collapse measure. From an arm lock or arm bar, one can collapse measure to free itself from this dangerous position, and bring his second hand to bear.

If a frontal grab is an attack from *frontale*, an uppercut is an attack from boar's tooth, a hip grab is an attack

from *porta di ferro*, and a jab is an attack in *posta longa*, what is the attack from *posta ala di pollo*? An elbow strike, obviously. The elbow is a very strong and hard body part,

which allows for tremendously powerful attacks (although it is close range). Furthermore, because the elbow is such a hard body part, it can be used to block a weapon, such as a long sword, if you are unarmed. It's not ideal, but it's much better than blocking with the hand or forearm. While you may damage your elbow, your arm should not be so damaged that it can't still be used.

Can *posta ala di pollo* be used with a weapon? Of course! What guard is assumed by the Companion in this play?



Of course, what is *Bicorno* if not a *posta ala di pollo* with a longsword? As it is used unarmed, it can be used to collapse measure, or to get out of a weak position - for example, just as a transition to *ala di pollo* can save one's arm from

being caught or broken in a *posta longa*, such as in the second play of *abrazare*, so can one save his longsword from a *posta longa*, such as an exchange or a break of the thrust. In this instance, recover to *bicorno* - or as I like to call it, *ala di pollo* - and regain initiative.

However, *posta ala di pollo* also has very practical applications throughout the manuscript - it is THE counter to the elbow push. When is the elbow push effective? When an opponent is in *longa* (with any weapon). Go to *ala di pollo* and avoid being 'turned'!

Conclusion

I believe I have successfully demonstrated the existence of *posta ala di pollo* by interpolating from Fiore's work, and demonstrated it's usefulness.

Hopefully, from now on, going *ala di pollo* will not be limited to an entrée at a good restaurant, it should be added the buffet that is *abrazare* and *armizare*. Not only limited to buffalo, hot, sweet and sour or blue cheese sauce, but also frontal, single, double, extended and reversed, armed and unarmed.